

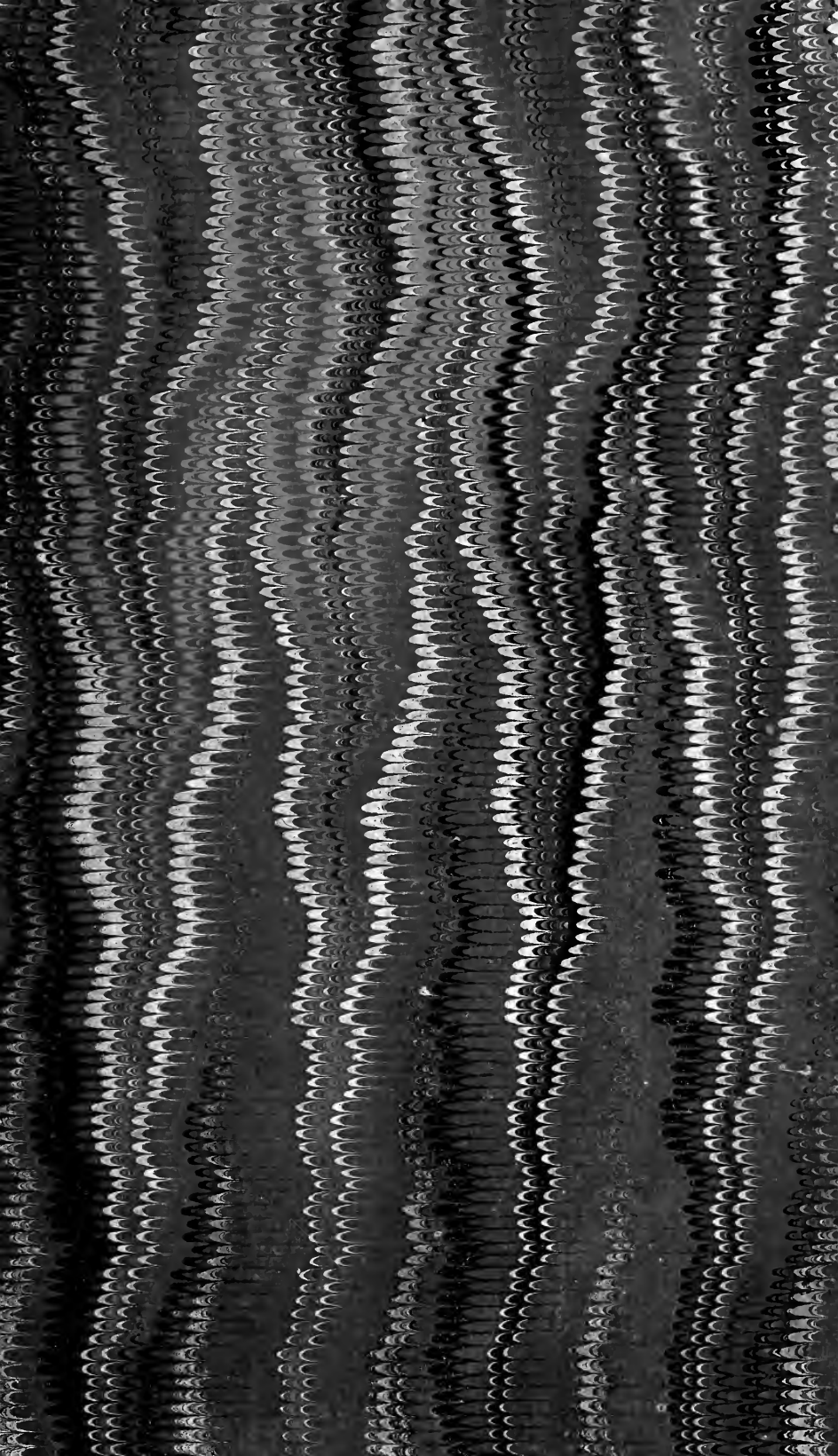
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AN ADDRESS
ON
CONGREGATIONALISM
AS AFFECTED BY THE DECLARATIONS OF THE
ADVISORY COUNCIL

HELD IN BROOKLYN, N. Y., FEBRUARY, 1876;

BY

✓
RICHARD S. STORRS, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS,

IN BROOKLYN.

DELIVERED MARCH 12TH, 1876.

WITH THE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS, IN RELATION THERETO,

MARCH 13TH, 1876.



*Chas. Y.
Haller & Son*

1876

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LETTER OF REQUEST.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., March 7, 1876.

Dear Dr. Storrs :

The undersigned, members of the Church of the Pilgrims, in view of the disturbed feeling existing in the church in respect of the Result of the late Advisory Council, request you to give notice from the pulpit next Sunday morning, of a church-meeting on next Monday evening, in the Lecture-Room, at 8 o'clock, to consider what action the church should take with reference to that Result. We also request you to state your view of the Result of that Council to the congregation, at the Sunday evening service.

With affectionate Christian regard,

Truly Yours,

RICHARD P. BUCK,
A. G. ALLEN,
WALTER T. HATCH,
JEREMIAH P. ROBINSON,
GEORGE L. NICHOLS,
FRANKLIN WOODRUFF,

ARCHIBALD BAXTER,
C. L. MITCHELL,
DWIGHT JOHNSON,
SIDNEY GREEN,
LUCIEN BIRDSEYE,
JOSHUA M. VAN COTT.

TO THE REV. R. S. STORRS, D. D.

In compliance with the foregoing Letter of Request, Rev. Dr. Storrs read to the congregation, at the service on Sunday evening, March 12th, 1876, the following

ADDRESS.

THE FACT having become public, by no agency of mine, that I have resigned prominent offices in the Congregational communion, and it having been naturally inferred by the public that I am not in sympathy with recent acts and utterances of those appearing to represent that communion, it seems proper that I should state distinctly the grounds of my objection to these, and my reasons for withdrawing from the positions which I had held. As to the personal charges which have been so long urged against the pastor of the Plymouth Church, I have never taken any part in the loud and painful public discussion; and I certainly shall not now begin. But I have some thoughts, which to me seem just, on the relation of the Result of the recent Council to the general scheme of Congregational government; and these I am not unwilling to present. Of course, they express only my opinions; and I have no smallest right or wish to do more than state them, for others to think of. But they are sincerely entertained, and over my action must be controlling.

The Advisory Council, whose Result I would consider, appears to have been one of fair ability, and respectable character, though not, perhaps, of unusual moral weight, or possessing any pre-eminent share of that indefinable authority which comes with conceded eminence in knowledge, experience, and Christian wisdom. It was large in numbers, however, representing a constituency, according to the statistics furnished me by a friend, of 34,611 members in the churches whose pastors or delegates were present; whereas the churches represented in the Council of 1874 have a present membership, I am told, of only 28,843. Of the seventeen divines individually invited to the previous Council, but ten were present. Of the twenty similarly invited to the more recent Council, twelve appeared.

The churches thus represented are scattered, also, very fairly over the country ; and, while some of them are of the second or perhaps of the third class of churches, in respect to numbers and public influence, their advice and testimony are as proper to be regarded, as indicating the views and the practice which obtain among them, as if they were planted in larger towns, and had had more chance to be publicly heard of. How far it may be true that a good many of them were called to this Council because of the known prepossessions of their pastors in favor of the Plymouth Church policy, and of its minister, I have no special means of knowing. Very likely this was true of a considerable portion. The roll of the Council seems to suggest it. The statement of the chairman of the business-committee appears to confirm it. And the fact, if it be one, may shed some light on the strange conclusions to which they came. Of course, while they were here they were naturally and constantly under the influence of the pastor who had called them, and of his frequent impassioned appeals, and were subject to the silent but powerful impression of the representations and feelings of the families in which they were being liberally entertained.

All this should fairly be considered in examining the Result which was put forth by them, and in estimating its probable future effect upon the general denominational development. At the same time, there certainly was in the Council a considerable number of capable and distinguished men, who have had more or less of moral leadership in Congregational representative bodies, and whose apparent adhesion to this Result gives it an importance which it otherwise might not have had. Colleges, theological seminaries, some prominent churches, were represented in it ; and the name of the brave and eloquent veteran who was its senior moderator, is itself an instrument of great value and force in the hands of those who accept the conclusions to which even he would appear to have assented.

Evidently, then, the Result of this Council is something which cannot be dismissed, as of trivial importance. As the formal, and apparently the unanimous utterance, of the last

and largest Congregational Council hitherto convened by a single church, it must be pondered by one who would know what the denomination is likely in the future to be and to do, and how far he can, with justice to his convictions, co-operate with it.

The declarations put forth in the Result to be scrutinized are loosely though quite ingeniously stated; but the meaning of them is not hard to be found, and the relation of them to the organizing principles and the practical working of the Congregational system is no more obscure than is the moon at its full on a clear night. Of course, some of these declarations are more important than others; but all have reference to occurring cases, and are intended to mould and govern church-practice, and so far all have a measure of importance.

1. The Result says, for example, that “in many cases” where a member has signified, not in writing or in speech, but “by his acts,” that he “has abandoned fellowship with a church, in doctrine, worship, or *Christian sympathy*,” it may properly separate him from it, without formal censure.

This is doubtless true, provided no charge has been made against the member, affecting his character, and provided, after due notice, he makes no objection to this interpretation of his acts. But stated indefinitely, as in this declaration, and leaving the church wholly at liberty to put its own interpretation on such of his acts as it chooses to recognize, and to decide for itself whether his is one of the “many cases” where such action is proper, it certainly is a dangerous doctrine. It seems hardly possible that the Council itself foresaw the perilous range of its words. Perhaps its members were so intent on the cases of those whose exclusion they had been brought here to justify, that they quite forgot the many others whom such a rash statement would equally affect. It places upon substantially the same footing, so far as liability to removal is concerned, the man who has excited animosities in the church by his zeal for the truth, and the man who has left it for the Roman Catholic communion. The one may be judged to have shown himself “by his acts” not in fellowship with it “in Christian

sympathy," as the other is not in doctrine, or in worship. Under it, so far as appears, a church may at any time cut off a member whose opinions and votes on exciting points of church-administration differ from those of the majority ; while, if this declaration is Congregational law, there is for such a one no redress.

It may possibly be said that the good sense and Christian feeling of the church may be relied on to prevent such abuse. But good sense and Christian feeling sometimes suffer a suspense ; and, in the interval, they are not a guaranty for the rights which rules are intended to conserve, which this rule, if adopted, would leave fatally exposed. No limit is set to the exercise of this power on the part of the church. Almost certainly the use of it would swiftly become tyrannical abuse, in the hands of an excited and passionate majority ; and such an abuse would seem justified beforehand by this vague but decided affirmation of the Council. It strikes at the man who moves or approves an unwelcome inquiry, as directly as at him who spurns and denounces the church itself. The only safety under it must be found in a passive agreement with the governing power within the society ; and any majority, determined on its ends, which should fail to make the church unanimous, under such an unlimited charter as this, must be wanting either in perception or in pluck.

Very likely this was not the intention of the Council. They may have used words without estimating their force. But the intention of the legislator is one thing, the effect of his rule is quite another ; and that the rule to which I demur is capable of exactly this application, I cannot doubt.

2. Still more dangerous, however, morally at least, is the further declaration that when a member has openly abandoned communion with the church, and is also charged with a scandalous offense, either by public rumor or by specific allegations, "the church may, to avoid greater scandal, use a wise discretion in *selecting* the offense [*i. e.*, either the absence, or the asserted gross wickedness] on which it shall separate him from it, and discharge itself from all further responsibility for his conduct and character."

This may seem plausible ; but, in effect, it relieves every church from the duty of investigating any offense of any offender, who does not himself prefer to be examined. It opens to him an easy way to escape all ecclesiastical inquiry, as to the grossest sins, and makes his irresponsibility to the church, for whatever foul and flagrant wrong-doing, nearly perfect. He is charged with forgery, adultery, slander, or with a flagrant breach of trust. He has also for some time been absent from the sacraments, as such a man would not be unlikely to have been. He may threaten to make a troublesome disturbance, if his sins are searched out ; and, according to this declaration of the Council, the church which he disgraces is under no binding obligation, to the community, to other churches, to the man himself, or to the Lord and Judge of all, to examine the grounds of the blasting accusation, though it fill the air, or though it be presented by specific allegations, and be sustained by unanswerable proof. That church is at liberty, “in a wise discretion,” to evade this painful but salutary duty, and to separate the offender from its future fellowship on the ground of his continued absence from church. The fleeing forger may be properly dismissed, on account of a sudden voyage to Holland, without reference to any suspected imitations of other men’s signatures ; and it might have been “a wise discretion” — each church must judge — to treat the incestuous Corinthian person whom Paul would have had “delivered unto Satan,” as one not entitled to further communion because of irregular church-attendance.

It will be to some a minor matter that this directly contravenes the Result of the Council of 1874. It authorizes the precise course pursued by Plymouth Church in the case then considered, which course the previous Council emphatically condemned, and declared sufficient, if repeated, to authorize the withdrawal of fellowship. By that Council the familiar Congregational doctrine was affirmed, in these terms : “When a regular complaint is made against such a member [*i. e.*, one voluntarily absent from the communion of the church, and from its worship] that in some other respect he violates the law of Christ, * * * the considera-

tion that he has long ago forsaken the church is only an aggravation of his alleged fault.”

It would hardly, perhaps, have been expected that a second Council, with the same moderator, should so explicitly contradict the first. It distinctly contravenes, and essentially nullifies, that section in the Platform which declares, in terms, that “when a Council, properly convened and orderly proceeding, has pronounced its advice, a second Council upon the substance of the same question, or upon the advice of the first, is manifestly improper” (part 3, chap. 2, sec. 10). It tends to leave everything unsettled ; to produce as many Councils as there are possible varieties of opinion among those who call them ; to put an end to all Councils, by making all useless.

But this may not be of cardinal importance. The really startling thing about this statement is that it prompts any criminal to evade a church-censure, by abandoning church-communion. It allows and encourages any church to save itself the trouble of examining and condemning the grossest offender, on condition that it will treat him as a recognized absentee. The specific allegations of those who know, the universal conviction pervading the community, that a member of the church is flagrantly immoral, leaves the church at liberty, at its own discretion, to say nothing about him except that he does not come to the communion.

It certainly seems to me that in this declaration the Council—without intention, of course, but in effect—has heaped dirt on the graves of its ancestors, and done grave dishonor to the name and the cause of the Lord of righteousness. The Lord says : “Woe unto that man by whom the offense cometh.” This rule says, rather : “Woe unto that church by whom the offense thus coming is exposed.” The common sense of the world is justified in demanding that the wolf in sheep’s clothing shall be shown for what he is. But this rule contemplates simply shutting the gate, when he goes from the fold, and leaving the fatal lamb-skins upon him.

3. Though not of any primary importance, a *dictum* of the Council in regard to a certain class of cases, specified in

the Letter-Missive, claims a moment's attention. It concerns members, otherwise unaccused, who absent themselves from the services, on the ground that they believe the pastor guilty of crime, though the church, after investigation, has acquitted and sustained him. The declaration is, that such a reason for absence, without asking for letters of dismissal, is "entirely invalid, schismatic, and unchristian." The wrath of the Council seems fully aroused against such wrong-doers, though it had just opened an outlet, so instant and so easy, for those accused of scandalous offenses.

Undoubtedly it is true that a member, believing, on sufficient evidence, that the pastor of the church is guilty of some tremendous wickedness, of which, however, the church as a body remains unconvinced, should seek elsewhere, when that is practicable, religious instruction, with the comfort and help which the sacraments bring. If such a one should continue in the church for any purpose of factious disturbance, he is justly to be condemned. His withdrawal from it, rather, is plainly a matter of Christian duty.

But there are manifold cases, not conceivable only, but actual, in which retirement from the church and union with another should properly be long postponed. There are not a few—as where no other church exists in the community, or in the neighborhood—where a letter of dismissal cannot be asked for, except as a mere matter of form. The better course would seem to be, in any such case, for the member to wait, in patience and in prayer, till God in His providence shall bring to light the hidden things, and make others the sharers of the painful knowledge which already is his. Such patient waiting may be the only possible way to rescue the church, and secure in the end the preaching from its pulpit of a purifying Gospel.

But, in the meantime, the Council says that such a member "should show himself loyal to the authority" of the church; and it regards "the conceit that he may protest more effectually against the supposed error of the church by partially withdrawing from its fellowship" as "eminently dangerous and disorganizing." If this means anything pertinent to the case, it means that in the proper or neces-

sary interval, between the conviction of the pastor's guilt and the final request for letters of dismissal, the member is bound to hear the Gospel from what he feels to be lying lips, and to receive the body of Christ from hands which he undoubtedly believes to be defiled with unconfessed lust. If he does not, the church will have right to drop him, whatever his relations to it have been, however strong his continuing interest in it and its welfare. It would seem, indeed, according to this statement, to have further right to cut him off, with formal censure, as "a dangerous disorganizer."

I do not know but the churches are prepared for a statement of this sort, and are ready to place it among their church-rules. But, for myself, I hesitate to accept it. In things so sacred as the fellowship of the personal soul with God, its Saviour, through His truth and His sacraments, I am not prepared to say that the ministry of one believed to be vicious must be accepted because others adhere to him ; that the ignorance of the church is to supersede the knowledge of the personal member, as the rule of his conduct. It may be quite impossible for him, under his convictions of duty, and in the circumstances in which he is placed, to ask for final letters of dismissal. He may even hope, by tarrying in the church, to be able to do something for it in the end, when the hour of calamity, which he foresees, has come upon it. But, in the interval, it strikes me that not his absence from the services, but his continued attendance upon them—his listening to the teachings, and accepting the sacraments, of one whom he entirely believes an impure hypocrite—this is the course which most requires apology or defense. And Plymouth Church itself, in a recent conspicuous and significant case, appears to be of the same opinion.

The Roman Catholic Church holds, of course, that the character of the officiating priest, however bad, does not impair the validity of his sacraments, if properly administered ; his official prerogative inhering indelibly, independently of his character. But I suspect that it will take more than the statement of this Council to make a like doctrine current with Protestants, concerning their ministers.

As I said, however, this is not a matter of primary importance to the churches at large, however important the right doctrine on the subject may be to individuals. But the next topic treated in this Result is of supreme consequence to the churches; and the statements in it, if accepted and carried out, appear to me simply destructive to the rights of individuals, and to all proper external relations between the churches.

4. A Mutual Council is defined in the Result as “one selected by mutual agreement between the parties.” It did not, perhaps, need professors in seminaries, or presidents of colleges, coming hundreds or thousands of miles for the purpose, to give this definition. If there were any question, as certainly there was, on which their testimony would have been timely, it was this: “Is a Mutual Council one in which the two opposed parties *agree in common on every member of the tribunal?* or is it one in which they agree in common on having a tribunal, and then proceed to constitute it, not in common, but mutually, by reciprocal interchange of selection of its members?”

This Council assumes it to be the former; and thereupon proceeds to say that Plymouth Church had “a right” to object to two of the churches named by her who had demanded the Council, and to make the objection at a meeting subsequent to that at which they had been named, and it had been agreed that they should be notified.

If that was the opinion of the members of the Council, they certainly are not to be blamed for expressing it. But, if their doctrine shall be generally accepted, it will have the effect to put an end to Mutual Councils, in all exciting and endamaging cases—the very cases for which they are needed. If one party has always “the right” to object to churches or ministers named by the other, inasmuch as the right is sure to be exercised by the party endangered in the summoning of the Council, the attempt to constitute such a tribunal must be about as hopeful as the attempt to get any fugitive from justice to beg judges and juries to give him a trial.

No limit whatever is put by the Council on the exercise of this "right." If one church is objected to as too near, another may be as too remote. One is too large, and another too small. One has in it—a possible delegate—a friend of one party ; and another is suspected of being committed, by some passage in its history, to a hostile course. The minister of one is not loose enough in his notions of retributive justice ; and the minister of another does not see the propriety of opening the Lord's Supper to all the world, at the risk of casting its holy pearls before the swine. The reasons are numberless to give excuse for objection. Indeed, no reason whatever need be given. The "right" is affirmed ; and the exercise of a right is not to be challenged, and requires no defense.

It is nearly as plain as anything can be, that any pastor who, with reason or without it, is under the apprehension that a Mutual Council may be likely to harm him, will never allow such a Council to be formed, if this *dictum* is accepted ; that any majority in a church, which expects or fears to be rebuked if its action is reviewed, will find no churches acceptable to it, except what it may name itself. And it is certainly just as plain that to break up the system of Mutual Councils is to dissolve the Congregational communion. It is to take away the chance of redress from every oppressed member of the church. It is to give the majority in each church an unhindered course, in which to work what wrong it will. It is to vacate the fellowship of the churches of significance and value, and to reduce it to a mere tradition or a name. A more dangerous blow was never delivered at that church-order which has guarantied to minorities a right to be heard, and made each church responsible for right-doing to the many standing in fellowship with it.

The Mutual Council, whose members are not chosen in common, but by reciprocal interchange of selection, and in which, therefore, either party may be sure of having those in whom it confides—this has been the *nexus* of the communion, and the strong defense of the injured or the weak.

If it be said that denying the right of either party to object to those proposed by the other, would leave each free to fill half the Council with its own partisans, the answer is obvious. When the proceedings of a Council are public, neither one of them can afford to be represented in it, exclusively or largely, by such partisans. The public finds them out, and discredits them at once. If their votes are against the argument, those votes hurt themselves, but help nobody else. In fact, the weakness of the cause which they try to assist, is only by them made apparent. The moral weight of the Council of 1874, came immensely from the fact that churches had been called to it from the centers of influence, without regard to commitments or prepossessions, and that a very considerable number held views opposed to those of the churches which had convened them. The weakness of this last Council comes as largely from the fact that the great majority of the men who composed it, were believed to be called because they were in sympathy with the action to be scrutinized, or with its authors. The presence of others, not understood to be thus pre-pledged, was all that saved the Council from popular disregard. Without such men in it, the effect of its Result, as compared with that of the other sort of Council, would have been like the weight of a ball of punk measured against a solid shot. Recognized partisanship makes the ablest man weak, the most eminent insignificant, and strips any verdict which they give or secure of value and force.

While common-sense governs men's conduct, they will see this for themselves, and act accordingly. But the conceded right of objection to members of a Council, named, on his proper responsibility, by the adverse party, is simply destructive to that system of tribunals which has been hitherto the strength and boast of Congregationalists.

5. The Council assures the public that it finds no reason to call in question the method by which the "Investigating Committee" of Plymouth Church was constituted, or the integrity with which its proceedings were conducted.

That the gentlemen who served on that anomalous committee are worthy of all social consideration, as pleasant

friends, kind neighbors, valuable citizens, no one will be so ready to admit as one who has known most of them long. But it has not been usually the case that an investigating committee is named wholly by the party accused. It does not generally consist exclusively of his personal friends, or business associates. If acting for a church, and taking the place of the church-committee, it has not been common to put upon it, as influential members, those not themselves members of the church—attendants on its services, but confessing for themselves no public allegiance to the law of its Head. It has not been customary for the committee, so constituted, to take as its legal adviser and counsel, the devoted and diligent attorney of the accused. And instances will hardly be found, prior to 1874, in which that attorney saw witnesses beforehand, and arranged with them so to shape his questions as to seem to examine them, while keeping from the committee damaging testimony—which is known to have been done in the instance, at least, of Mr. Richards.

A committee so composed, and so conducted, whatever the personal worth of its members, would seem about as effective for elucidating obscure and complicated facts, especially for evolving inimical facts against its nominator, as a brush of feathers for excavating mines. It may have its uses, but that is not one of them. In comparison with it, the committee of three distinguished, wealthy, and estimable gentlemen who examined the New York City accounts, and certified to their correctness, a few months before the Ring exploded, was a judicious and satisfactory body.

If the Council, however, thought this arrangement fair, and adapted to relieve men's minds of uncertainty, they are not to be complained of for having approved it. But neither must they complain hereafter when any Congregational minister, accused of whatever concealed wickedness, insists on having a similar committee: selected by himself; comprising men of great social power, but not members of the church; guided and guarded by his vigilant attorney; sitting in secret; selecting the witnesses whom it will hear; judging beforehand, as the Council says is right, "whether their evidence would be material;" superseding the regular

committee of the church, and making at last only such a report of the evidence presented as shall seem best fitted to sustain its result. A minister must be exacting, indeed, who is not satisfied with such astute and comprehensive arrangements for guarding him from a threatening inquiry. And, as the minister has no personal rights which every other church-member does not equally possess, any member may demand a like committee when *his* character and acts are the subject of scrutiny. I see not why, upon this plan, the Examining Committee should not be wholly laid aside, in cases of discipline; and members be released from even the necessity of refraining from the communion in order to escape its scrutiny. When that has come to pass, the function of the church, as a guard and a witness for Christian purity, will seem, according to the logical force of this Result, to be quite fulfilled.

Since the Council endorses the constitution and the conduct of this famous committee, without hesitation and without limitation, it looks as if a precedent of considerable importance had got itself established—so far, at least, as the earnest approval of this large and respectable representative body can give it establishment.

6. Lest, however, even this arrangement should not give a wholly sufficient protection to a minister, accused of whatever wickedness, the Council in another way makes his security nearly perfect. This is one of the most remarkable things connected with this remarkable Result.

The church in the Andover Seminary had addressed to the Plymouth Church a wise and tender fraternal letter, expressing its concern at the injury suffered by the cause of religion, in consequence of the painful anxiety felt by many in regard to the character of the pastor of the latter, and asking the Plymouth Church to unite with it in calling a Council, fully and impartially to examine the facts, and set the Christian mind of the country forever at rest. The letter was adopted after the recent Council had been summoned, as touching a matter of vital importance which that had not been invited to treat; and it reached Plymouth Church only forty-eight hours before this Council was assembled. Going

wholly outside its Letter-Missive, the Council took up this application, and adopted certain resolutions about it:—a function for which it had not been appointed, from which it was properly wholly debarred by that fundamental provision in the Platform which expressly limits every Council to “the subjects specified in the Letter-Missive,” and on which it had no more right to enter than on the simultaneous trial of General Babcock. In giving an opinion adverse to the letter of the Andover Church, it curiously illustrated the revolutionary character of much of its action. The old rule has been that an *ex-parte* Council cannot be called till a Mutual Council has been refused. Here the rule is reversed, end for end, and a Council, certainly wholly *ex parte* as concerning this matter, declares a future Mutual Council out of order.

In doing this abnormal thing it “solemnly declares” certain propositions which may be best understood by applying them to a possible case.

The church in A entered into fellowship with the church in B, when the latter was constituted, and still stands in that fellowship, interchanging with it members, meeting it in Councils, and in its measure responsible for it before the public.

The church in B called a pastor, and at his installation the church in A entered also into fellowship with *him*, by a distinct and separate act; and it stands in that fellowship, receiving him to its pulpit, meeting him in Councils, inviting him on occasion to administer its sacraments, and in its measure responsible for him before the public.

This pastor comes to be considered by many immoral in life, perhaps an infidel in opinion; and such a rumor pervades the air, the evidence of the fact is widely affirmed to be in possession of many persons. But under his strong personal influence, and through the incessant and shrewd activity of those who adhere to him, the mass of his church continue their attachment, and one by one those who dissent are extruded from it. Comparative unanimity is thus secured, though at the sacrifice of much that was important. But still the rumors do not abate, and the Gospel seems dishonored in the house of its friends.

The church in A feels the increasing and overwhelming burden of this evil fame attaching to the pastor to whom its public fellowship has been pledged, and is anxious that the matter be impartially examined—that, if innocent, the minister accused may be cleared, or, if guilty, be removed; that in either case the pressure may be lifted from the churches, and the name of Christ be freed from reproach. It has no end whatever to gain except his protection, if he be guiltless; the protection of the churches, if he is not; and the furtherance, either way, of the supreme and immortal cause. Under the “solemn declaration” of this Council, what can it do to accomplish this end?

In general, the reply is: It can do nothing not already precisely specified in the Cambridge Platform of 1648; for the Boston Platform of 1865 seems, with intention, to be left out of sight. But suppose that those more ancient regulations did not contemplate the precise case, so exceptional in its nature, where a man widely accused of guilt is still sustained by the mass of his church; cannot the complaining church then apply to the new case the principles of that Platform, and solicit the other church to unite with it in convening a Council, mutually selected, to investigate the acts and the character of the man who is pastor of the one, and to whom the other has given its fellowship? “No,” says the Council, “it cannot do that. Here is what and *all* it can do.”

First, it may suitably admonish the church in B, and remonstrate against its dereliction of duty.—That church is not the prime or real offender. It may be deceived, as were even the apostles when they trusted their treasurer; but its misapprehension is not a crime. The pastor is the one whom the scandal concerns, and who needs investigation. But concerning him the church in A, which has given to him its public fellowship, is not allowed to even inquire. It is as if in a suspected commercial crime the alleged forger could not even be questioned, but only the innocent acceptor of his note.

Secondly, this remonstrance bringing no satisfaction, the anxious and troubled church in A may acquaint other

churches with the objectionable action of the church in B, still refraining from complaint of its pastor, and ask them to unite with it in a further admonition.—This is a step which the Boston Platform does not recognize, and the authority for inserting which, on the part of this Council, is not apparent. It simply puts a further fetter on a progress already sufficiently slow. It requires a most unwelcome correspondence, carrying the discussion into different churches, involving the risk of division in each, and still aiming, as before, not at the pastor, whom the rumors affect, but at his contented and well-meaning church. But suppose that time and patience are given for doing *this* work, and that still no issue satisfactory is reached. What next may be done?

Thirdly, the admonishing churches, taking the law into their own hands, may forbear communion with the church in B, and call a Council to consider the case; but this Council “has power to inquire and consider *only*” whether the church in B “is really acting contrary to order and duty.”

Even power to exclude it, or advise its exclusion, from the general fellowship, if it should be found to be so acting, is not affirmed by this cautious declaration. So far as appears, the Council can only “inquire and consider,” which, perhaps, they might have done at home, without taking any corporate action. Certainly they can take none which directly concerns the pastor involved. As to that, the church in A is absolutely, vehemently, precluded from any attempt at it by the *dictum* of this assembly. No such church, it says, with unwonted emphasis, “has the right or the power” to claim to take part in any investigation of his character, either through a Mutual Council proposed by itself, or by an *ex-parte* Council, on the failure of that. The entire process must stop short with the calling of a Council to “inquire and consider” whether the related church in B is acting regularly in retaining for its pastor a man whom it confides in, while others believe him an immoral skeptic.

A more perfect illustration of the “way not to do it,” it seems to me, was never presented since the son in the parable said, “I go, sir,” and went not.

The church in A entered into fellowship with the church in B, and still raises no question as to its general moral soundness. If it made objection to its rules of procedure, it could arrange that, by a conference or a Council. But that is not its present grievance. It, also, by a separate public act, entered into fellowship with the pastor of that church. It has no judgment to utter against him ; but it knows him to be suspected by many intelligent and God-fearing persons to be a guilty hypocrite. His shadowed name darkens its life. The unabating rumors against him make further effective Christian activity impossible for it. They give impulse and edge to the sneer of the skeptic, and break the force of every sermon. But, according to the vehement volunteered deliverance of this recent assembly, it can no more touch him with any proper church-inquiry, through an impartial tribunal for the purpose, than it can strike with the blow of impeachment a cabinet officer. The fellowship, which makes it responsible for him, forbids it to ask whether his name with the general public should be Judas or John. It can only approach his innocent church ; ask others to do so ; forbear communion with it, if it please ; and at last call a Council “to inquire and consider,” not whether the pastor is a dissolute pretender to a grace he does not know, but whether his church has been acting in order. If it accomplishes anything whatever toward investigating the character of the minister accused, with whom it stands in public fellowship, and whose alleged wickedness brings a constant and sore reproach upon it, it does this only by indirection, and under the cover of a different aim. It can only reach him by considering, and possibly censuring at last, not himself, but those who believe in him. It can only raise the question of guilt in the pulpit, by inquiring into the orderly conduct of the possibly mistaken but morally sound disciples in the pews.

If this is Congregationalism, I cannot but suspect that the general Christian mind of the country will think it has had about enough of it. Certainly no priest or minister in any other body of Christians ever known on earth was so carefully and entirely shielded from inquiry, as to his character,

as is the pastor of a Congregational church, according to the statement of this assembly, so long as he succeeds in keeping his hold upon his circle of local hearers. His power to deceive them is the guaranty of his safety. Their ignorance is his absolute defense. He may laugh at all ecclesiastical inquiry, from whatever quarter, so long as his personal followers adhere, and while the "solemn declaration" of this Council spreads above him its shield and buckler.

As if to drive the very last nail in the screen which is to hide him, the Council makes even this tedious, indirect, and unworthy process to be conditioned upon a previous "neglect to investigate" on the part of the church to which he ministers. If there has been some form of investigation, with which that church has declared itself satisfied, the church which stands in fellowship with it cannot, without an unjust violence, send its first admonition.

It does not seem extravagant to say that no paralysis ever chained all the muscles of motion and of speech as the statement of this unauthorized Council would chain the zeal of an intelligent church, which sees the whole progress of religion impeded by the swarming and ever-renewed allegations of unconfessed wickedness in one with whom it stands in fellowship, but into whose conduct, according to this, it can no more inquire than into the secrets of a Turkish harem. I would not overstate the matter; but, really, this declaration of the Council almost amounts to a practical invitation to any deceptive and plausible rogue to enter the Congregational ministry, and there get a safety which the world outside is not ready to offer.

No heresy, even, it would appear, however destructive, can be questioned about by the neighboring churches until it has so far gained acceptance with a church that it is willing to allow and endorse it. A practical protection is carefully secured to it, in all its earlier development and progress; and the doors of the communion seem flung wide open for any defection from the faith of the Gospel.

If it be said that the Council was limited by the Cambridge Platform, and so shut up to these damaging conclusions, the reply is immediate: that there is a Platform later than that,

more recent therefore in its equivalent authority, and much more familiar among the churches, which, at least, provides that any church, after due admonition, may call a Council to advise whether another church "tolerates and upholds notorious scandals;" which Council, finding that it does so after proper inquiry, may advise the withholding from it of communion. If it be said that even this authority for instituting an inquiry, uninvited by the one church, but indispensable to the others, does not warrant a full investigation into the alleged scandalous facts, it must be replied that such technical and verbal adherence to a rule, when the case is not one which the rule fully contemplated, would be a most idle "sticking in the letter." Grant that the ancient Platform, framed in a pure simplicity of manners, did not contemplate precisely the case of one to whom his church shall adhere while multitudes of minds outside of that church conceive him guilty, and concerning whom, after, it may be, dreadful years of discussion and suspense, opinion is more divided than at first;—Congregationalism, if possessing a true vitality, must certainly be able to apply its principles, by some normal process in harmony with those principles, to the exacting and novel case. If it cannot, it is too weak for a crisis, and already too old for the times. If it cannot, the organic law which restrains it, and makes it incapable of meeting such emergencies, is condemned beyond the hope of reversal.

The Andover proposal was in no sense inconsistent with the earliest Platform, much less with the later. It was in perfect intimate harmony with their spirit, and their principles; though it sought, I may admit, to illustrate that spirit, apply those principles, in a case hitherto quite unexampled. Acceptance of it would have remedied a defect, and filled out a polity. Rejection of it, and the substitution for it of something as utterly foreign as possible to both Platform and polity, is the very sharpest dishonoring censure that could, as I think, have been passed upon both.

But this is the thing which comes next in order.

7. Having made the Mutual Councils of churches either practically impossible, by giving to each contesting party

the right of veto on the other's nominees, or else, as where a pastor is involved, incompetent to any useful office, and apparently feeling still, in spite of any pre-commitment of its members, and in spite of the impassioned declarations which met them, that further investigation must in some way be had, outside of the church, in order to any relief of religion from the load it has been carrying, and especially to any timely vindication of the churches of its order, the Council proceeds to invent a new instrument for the purpose; and this is the real consummation of its work.

The fact that it had no authority to do this, conferred by the Letter which was its charter, does not seem in the least to have hindered its zeal. For any such purpose it was only a casual, illegitimate assembly, as destitute of authority as any street-meeting. But it took up the work with ardent devotion, and certainly came to a wonderful result. It proposes an instrument for such investigation, apparently simple, but in reality curiously complex, and places the entire management of it as completely in the hands of those desiring a particular result as the wheel of the ship is in the hands of the helmsman.

A brief analysis will make this apparent.

First, a committee of three members of the Council is appointed, to organize a commission; these three members being excellent gentlemen, whose confidence in the pastor to be investigated is said to be expressed and complete.

Secondly, these members, in forming the commission, are authorized to select any five names out of twenty; among which twenty are several of gentlemen whose eagerness for a result of vindication would be likely to stand a tremendous shock, from whatever evidence.

Thirdly, if these five nominees should not all consent or be able to serve, any three of them are a quorum, and may fill up the vacancies with any persons whom they shall select, whether named in the previous list or not.

If a commission organized like this is not, from its inception, committed, by all the sentiments of its members, to a special result, the customary laws which regulate human action must have been reversed, and the stream and the fountain be no longer alike.

Fourthly, this commission is, apparently, not to be organized till after the lapse of sixty days, during which charges may be presented—after which they cannot be—by parties making themselves responsible [it is not said to whom] for the truth and proof of the same. Whether these parties must be members of Plymouth Church or not does not clearly appear. The most intimate representative of the pastor in that church has once said that “by all civil or ecclesiastical law” they must be. But subsequent statements appear to change this. That they cannot know beforehand who are to try the charges which they present, is obvious at first sight. They present them in the dark, to an unknown tribunal.

Fifthly, the commission, so organized, without hearing any evidence in support of the charges, may decide that they have already been sufficiently tried, and on that ground may dismiss the complaint.

Sixthly, if at the end of sixty days no charges have been presented, it seems to be provided, in a strangely complicated series of words, that the commission may yet be organized, if the committees of the church and the Council deem it desirable, to hear testimony not previously given, which they think may throw light upon the charges already tried. In other words, if the committee of the church wish then to present *ex-parte* testimony on behalf of the pastor, the commission may be organized to hear such testimony, and to render a general verdict upon it. It would not be stranger than other things have been, if this should turn out to be the sole function of this commission.

By the approval of the Council in the parallel case of the “investigating committee” this commission is authorized beforehand to sit in secret, to use its own judgment in calling for witnesses, and in concluding, before they are called, “whether their evidence would be material.” It is unrestrained by any rules, except the discretion of its members. It cannot, probably, protect witnesses before it from suits for slander, on account of their testimony. It is responsible to no one. It has simply to report the result which it may reach to the Examining Committee of Plymouth Church, to be given by that committee to the public; and Plymouth

Church itself is not even advised to accept the result, or do anything about it, except to publish it. The action of the commission is evidently intended, however, to be a finality, beyond which inquiry never shall go.

It would certainly be unjust to the many honest members of the Council to even suspect that this curious commission was allowed by them to be organized in their name for the purpose of acquittal. It might not, perhaps, be wholly unjust to the shrewder minds behind the scheme to suspect that they thought it adapted to give a show of readiness to meet hostile charges, without involving serious danger—an ecclesiastical Quaker-gun, which looks ready for any service, but through whose silent wooden mouth no shot can pass. It certainly is not too much to say that no result in the least likely to be attained by such a commission can do anything important toward enlightening and purifying the fetid darkness in which the churches of Brooklyn and of the land have long been walking.

But, even if it could, is it not a humiliating, if not an alarming fact, that all the ancient and honored methods of general administration among related Congregational churches, by means especially of Mutual Councils, are suddenly completely set aside, by an assembly not empowered to do it, in favor of a contrivance like this—extemporized, untried, and possibly attended with more peril and perplexity than the wisest can foresee? It is a contrivance as unknown as court-martials to all preceding Congregational history. It may be wholly *ex-parte* in constitution, while fulfilling perfectly the provisions which frame it. It could not displace the pastor from his pulpit, though it should find him guilty at last of worse offenses than his accusers have ever alleged. It cannot even advise the withdrawing of fellowship from the church which sustains him, though that church, in the face of a damnatory verdict, should unitedly adhere to him. It is as wholly irresponsible a body, to the Council which devised it, to the affiliated churches of the communion, as it is to Prince Bismarck. It need not give a semblance of reason for its finding; and any Council subsequently convened could not act upon that finding, except

after full consideration of its grounds, without the grossest injustice.

One cannot but stand perplexed, and almost aghast, before the proposal for such a commission, put forth in the name of the Congregational churches, from the sea-coast to the mountains, by an assembly not authorized to do any such thing, and by an assembly which could not regard the Andover proposal as properly Congregational ; which felt itself constrained to advise its rejection, because chapter and verse did not appear in the Cambridge Platform empowering one church to ask another to unite with it in a Mutual Council, to clear, if possible, the character of a minister, pastor of the one church, but received to its public fellowship by the other. The gnat and the camel *will* recur to one's thoughts !

The development of Congregationalism, in a needed direction, by a cordial approval of the Andover proposal, would have made churches more fraternal, ministers improperly accused more safe, and would have added stability and vigor to a system of government adapted at the outset to a limited region, but now extending over areas continental, of which the Fathers never dreamed. But this novel arrangement, for an irresponsible secret commission, is no more a development of any principle in the Platforms of the communion, or in its previous history, than an iron spike driven into its trunk is the development of a peach-tree. If it should become a precedent at all, it would simply be a precedent for an unhindered license in inventing new methods of church-inquiry, and putting upon them our ancient name. The next Council might, with equal propriety, propose the public drawing of lots to decide a man's character, as more scriptural in its nature, and not less Congregational.

The above are some of the principal points presented in this remarkable "Result," which appear to justify a degree of apprehension, and to be fitted to make men pause before they allow themselves to even seem to be committed to principles so rash, and to measures so strange. But, after all, the radical trouble, with any one who thoughtfully considers it, lies deeper than these.

To put a power, practically unlimited, of excluding members on account of their "acts," as showing a want of "Christian sympathy," into the hands of any majority ; to authorize any church to let the great sinner go unrebuked, if he has ceased attending the services ; to require a member who fully believes in the pastor's guilt to continue to attend on his ministrations, when a letter of dismissal is for any reason impossible to be asked for, denouncing his course as "unchristian" if he does not ; to make Mutual Councils practically impossible, in difficult cases, by requiring a common agreement of the parties on all the members, and giving to each "the right" to object to the other's nominees ; to endorse for the past, and so authorize for the future, an "investigating committee" selected by the accused, not wholly composed of even church-members, and affectionately devoted to the man whose acts it is to examine ; to forbid one church to ask another to unite with it in a faithful endeavor to clear themselves, and the Christian community, of the injury involved in ever-recurring and unsettled charges against a minister for whom both in their measure are responsible ; to put forth a commission, such as that here proposed, as a substitute for the usual Councils of the churches—these things are enough to startle the dullest.

But still behind and beyond all these breaks forth on one's thoughts that greater question, more unsettling to the mind than even these strange and eccentric propositions : If a Result like this be accepted, then what is left, in the entire Congregational plan, to be regarded as finally settled ? What can ever be considered fixed and defined, beyond the reach of the first rash impulse ?

If one Council can commend the rules which a previous Council—certainly not of less intelligence—has declared, if carried out, sufficient to justify the withdrawal of fellowship ; if one can adjudge specific cases, in effect, if not in form, by principles which the other declared unsound ; if one can answer three several questions, specifically proposed to a previous Council, and answer them in exactly the opposite sense ; if a Council, not empowered for the purpose, can construct and set forth a wholly new instrument for

church-inquiry, and supersede by it all the usual church tribunals ; if it can forget its own Letter-Missive, and enter on important and difficult business of which in that appeared no mention ; if even the permanent Platforms of the communion have no directing or limiting force in any such case, but a Council, once organized, may consider any question, and assume any function, which others shall suggest or which it may contrive—what basis remains for any settled rules whatever ? Why contend for such rules, when the only possible effect seems to be to heap up sand, which the next foot may scatter, or any puff of breath blow down ? Of what possible use are discussion and effort to get anything defined, or anything established ? And if that cannot be, what alternative is left for one who would build an orderly church, according to wise and intelligible rules, on whose permanent validity he can rely, but to get himself out, as soon as he can, of such rickety confusion ? It is idle to build our edifices of stone, if the rules of the church, more important to it than buildings, are so mutable and shifting. Anybody can put materials together, if they are solid ; but it takes nothing less than miraculous power to make a permanent wall of water.

I left the positions which it had been pleasant for me to occupy, because of the pressure of these thoughts upon me. I did not do it as declaring a purpose to leave at once the communion I was born in, in which my fathers had ministered before me, and in which my whole public life has been passed. I have no claim to influence others ; but, for myself, I wait to see what others say, what the general mind of the churches says, to these extraordinary recent proceedings. It may be that such a reaction will come as will give to the general scheme of government, which to me now appears almost fatally threatened, a new term of life, with more of stability, order, and strength. But, unless such comes, I do not see how any man can abide for long in a house so frail in its foundations, and so infirm in its structure, that it may tumble in heaps around him at any moment.

Certainly, I cannot. I have not years enough left for work to give any large future part of them to rebuilding the

platform on which I am to stand. I see the heads around me growing whiter. I know that whatever force I have must now be used for the service of God, in the manifestation of his Divine Son. With me the blossoms have fallen; the ripening fruit-season is fast passing; the October tints are not far in the distance. There are subjects on which I love to dwell, as those who hear me will bear witness; but these questions of a changeful external polity are not among them. There are transcendent and immortal results, for others and myself, for which I would work. I cannot be always unavailingly trying to get the very primary rules of church-order re-established.

The Congregational system has had a great history. Its colleges and seminaries, as well as its churches, are trophies that will not let others sleep. It has given abundantly to other communions, and has all the time been enriched itself. Its ministers have often been pre-eminent in the communities which they have moulded. Its missionaries have walked the dark places of the world, in the white of an apostolic charity, and sometimes in the crimson of martyrdom. Its great benefactors, of institutions and of man, shine crowned with the gold of a glorious beneficence. But it cannot live always by virtue of its past. If it would still surpass that history, in its future development over the country, if it would attract the best minds to itself, or even hold the common minds which it has trained, it must do it by securing the purest Gospel in the teaching and the life of both ministers and members. It must, at least, assure the world that it provides established rules, which conserve and cherish Christian purity; that members received to the churches which it forms cannot be released from them, whatever their crimes, by simply absenting themselves from the sacrament; that Councils are assured to the humblest member who feels aggrieved, in which those whom he trusts and respects shall sit unchallenged; that any minister in its communion, accused of gross sin, shall be properly questioned, and impartially judged, by a regular, speedy, and competent tribunal; and that, while giving the right hand of fellowship to either minister or church is made as easy as to draw on one's glove,

it shall not be as wholly impossible to withdraw it, whatever the occasion, as it is to escape from one's poisoned skin.

As at present presented, in this recent "Result," the whole scheme seems absurd. The man who builds churches at the West or the South, or in his own city, on the basis of its principles, appears to me to be doing all he can to heap up anxiety and trouble for himself, and to make the external Kingdom of Christ a mere confused, chaotic jumble.

Last of all, it must be said, with the utmost emphasis, that a method must be found, if one does not exist, and a method in harmony with the primary principles which are organic in the system, for securing a recognized purity in the pulpit; at least, for releasing other churches in fellowship from all responsibility for any one accused, by many voices, of reduplicated crimes, and the question of whose possible guilt continues, year after year, an incessant subject of public debate. The recent Council distinctly admits, and conspicuously affirms, that *its* accepted Congregational scheme has no regular and appropriate way whatever for searching into and settling a vast public scandal in one of its churches; that that can only be done, if at all, by some machinery wholly unknown to either of its Platforms, to any of its manuals, to any tradition of its elders; and that neither a requesting member of the church, nor a member dropped from the roll against protest, and while making severest charges against the pastor, nor any sister church, near or remote, can effectively secure such a Mutual Council as might explore and end the scandal.

Nay, more than this: each one of the proceedings by which the church, enthusiastically devoted to its pastor, has fostered to its portentous growth this detestable incubus on all American Christian life, is authorized and endorsed by this numerous Council. The dropping of one of its members from the roll, after he had charged the pastor with adultery, and when a complaint, on account of such charges, by a member of excellent standing and repute, had been formally lodged against him; the peculiar appointment and peculiar procedures of the "investigating committee," on account of which their verdict wholly failed to restore public confi-

dence ; the cutting off of another member, without trial or censure, in spite of her protest, and in face of her terrific declaration that the pastor, who for years had opened to her the secrets of his confidence, was to her knowledge a perjured adulterer ; the denial to her of a Mutual Council, under cover of an objection to two of the churches named by her, which made it impossible for them to appear, and justified others in equally declining ; the repulse of the gentle and noble overture from the Andover church—every one of these proceedings is emphatically endorsed, the last was suggested, by this large and influential representative body.

The machinery of Congregationalism, according to it, is precisely adapted to prolong and keep alive such a scandal as the present ; but is hopelessly incompetent, in its normal provisions, to bring it to an end. Any other similar demoralizing development, hereafter arising, is, therefore, as fully assured as it can be of having as long a run as this, and of keeping the anxious mind of the public as widely feverish and festered as now. The irresponsible “ Scandal Bureau ” may need to be often repeated hereafter, may need to be made a permanent institution, under such an astonishing scheme of “ government.”

I seriously think that if a way had been sought to make the Congregational name a by-word and a hissing to the entire American people, I had almost said to the civilized world, the way thus adopted was the very best possible ; and that unless the method proposed by the Andover church, or one equivalent to this, shall be insisted on as just and right, and shall ere long be carried to success, the ancient and honored denominational title, in which we have rejoiced, will be so smirched that no one who can help it will be willing to wear it. If it be true that Congregationalism, after centuries of development, and after three years of public distraction by this hideous rumor of an unexplored wickedness, has really no power to do anything about it, in an effective and legitimate way, but can only approve the successive steps by which the present paralysis has been reached, men ought not to be severely blamed if they adjudge it unworthy, at least, of further respect.

It is not pleasant to me to write thus. I remember the schools in which I was trained. I remember the graves by which I have stood. I remember the grand and saintly souls who are now with the Church of the First-born above. I remember the almost thirty years in our own congregation—of happy, harmonious, and useful church life, with the truths that have stirred us, the promises that have raised us as on the swift celestial wings, the Divine influence that has wrought on our souls, the sacraments where we have seen the Lord. I remember the other churches around us, to which I have given whatever I had of counsel and support, and in whose welfare my heart has expanded with new delight; and I hardly can bear even now to read, I would almost recall, if it were possible, the words I have felt constrained to write. But *VERA PRO GRATIS* is as good a rule now as in earlier times. And it is as true of the government of the churches as it is of their worship, that “God is not the author of confusion.”

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CHURCH.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., March 13, 1876.

Pursuant to notice from the pulpit on the last Lord's Day, the members of THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS assembled in their Lecture Room, at 8 p. m. The meeting was opened with prayer by the Pastor, R. S. STORRS, D. D., Moderator.

Mr. Walter T. Hatch then offered the following Preamble and Resolutions, and moved their adoption, which motion was seconded.

Whereas, There is a known and authoritative ecclesiastical law of the Congregational communion, evidenced by its usages, and its accredited Platforms of polity, by which the validity of the acts of churches and of Councils is determinable; and

Whereas, The procedures of churches and Councils which do not conform to that law are disorderly, illegal, and revolutionary, and not binding upon individual churches, or the Congregational communion; and

Whereas, The late Advisory Council convened in Brooklyn in February, 1876, did, in its published Result of Council, in terms or effect, declare and affirm :

- (1) That a subsequent ordinary Council may disregard, annul, and set aside the Result of a previous Council, which acted within its Letter-Missive, and within the acknowledged competency of a Council:
- (2) That a Church may, without reproach for laxity of discipline, drop a member for alleged prolonged absence from ordinances, or other minor offense, without inquiring into the truth of graver charges publicly and specifically made against the moral and Christian character of such member; "selecting" a minor "offense on which it shall separate him from its fellowship," that it may avoid the scandal of investigating and cutting him off for the graver offense :
- (3) That a Council may declare itself upon matters of the gravest concern to an individual church, and to the collective churches of the communion, which are not submitted by the Letter-Missive, from which, by the consentaneous act of the inviting and invited churches, the sole authority of the individual delegates and of the collective Council is derived, and by which its functions are strictly limited:

- (4) That without hearing a church which has proffered a Mutual Council to a sister church, and without a submission of that question by the Letter Missive, a Council may advise the latter church that such proffer was unauthorized and should be rejected, and may thus take upon itself the exclusive responsibility for the rejection of a proffer which it was within the undoubted competency of one church to make, and of the other church to accept:
- (5) That after agreeing to unite in calling a Mutual Council, each party has an unconditional and unlimited right, by objecting, to exclude from the Council any church or Minister proposed by the other party to be invited, even irrespective of the question whether such excluded church or Minister is in truth and in fact so committed to a pronounced judgment in the case as to be morally ineligible to sit in the Council; that such right of exclusion exists even after the excluded church or Minister has been named, agreed to, and by arrangement between the parties notified that an invitation will be sent, and may be exercised so as to exclude from a Mutual Council (one-half of which is to be named by each party) all churches which, and all Ministers who, by their maturity of age, experience, and wisdom, or by reason of vicinage, or special knowledge of the parties, or of the relevant facts on which the Council is to pronounce a conclusion, are in the nature of things most competent, morally and intellectually, to conclude wisely and justly :
- (6) That a pastor (and by parity of reasoning a church-member, who has equal rights with the pastor), who is charged with a scandalous offense, may be permitted by his church to pass by the standing Examining Committee, and constitute a *special* committee, of attached friends and business associates (some of whom are not members of the church), to investigate the charge, with the assistance and direction of his private attorney; and that the church may accept an investigation by such special committee, so constituted and directed, and its decision, as ample and final, and as relieving such church of all duty to make further inquiry into the truth of the charge:
- (7) That a Council may set aside the orderly method of investigating, by a regularly constituted Council, a grave matter which concerns the purity and good name of all the churches, and may substitute therefor a secret Commission, anomalous in the mode of its constitution, in the definition and limitation of its functions, and its methods of procedure; and, in the *personnel* of the tribunal, so unknown that confidence cannot be implicitly reposed in either its integrity, intelligence, or impartiality; therefore,

Resolved, First: That the Church of the Pilgrims does not accede to, and will not be bound by, the principles so declared in this Result of Council; that it regards those principles as novel, false, and revolutionary, and subversive of the Platforms and polity of the Congregational communion; and that it does not hold itself bound to continue in denominational fellowship with any church which adheres to those principles.

Resolved, Secondly: That upon the fundamental principles of the Congregational Platforms and polity—principles which underlie all voluntary corporate association and effort—whatever concerns the collective brotherhood of the churches may be judged by that brotherhood in a properly constituted Council, ordinary or extraordinary, according to the particular case; and that if a church proves itself unwilling, or unable, by some appropriate ecclesiastical procedure, instituted by itself, or in any orderly way proffered by sister churches, to rid itself of a scandal which tends and threatens to discredit all the churches, it is the right, and may be the imperative duty, of the brotherhood of churches, to institute inquiry, in order to rid itself either of such scandal or of such church; and that we shall regard a final denial of such right of the brotherhood of churches to investigate, in any extreme case, through an ecclesiastical Council, as endangering not only the purity but the very existence of the communion of Congregational churches.

An amendment to the motion to adopt the Preamble and Resolutions was offered by Mr. Alexander Forman, that the Preamble and Resolutions as read, and the Address of the Pastor, as delivered last evening, be printed, and put into the hands of members of the congregation, and further action be postponed for two weeks, to give a further opportunity to consider these questions.

After some discussion, in which several members took part, the question was called for, and decided in the negative, by a rising vote, only twenty-three voting for the amendment.

The sections of the Preamble were then read by the Moderator, and voted upon *seriatim*, and were adopted by a vote of nearly four to one.

The question upon the adoption of the Resolutions was then called for, and a rising vote being demanded, the first Resolution was carried by a vote of seventy-eight in the affirmative, to twenty-five in the negative.

The second Resolution was then read, and declared adopted, by a vote of eighty-five to fourteen.

The question was then put upon the adoption of the Preamble and Resolutions as a whole, and they were declared adopted, by a vote of ninety in the affirmative, against twenty-three in the negative.

The following Resolution was then offered by Mr. W. T. Hatch, and carried :

Resolved, That the Moderator be requested to appoint a committee of three, of whom the Clerk of the church shall be one, to arrange for the publication, in pamphlet form, convenient for circulation, of the Address delivered last evening by our Pastor, upon the Result of the recent Advisory Council, and also the proceedings of this meeting ; with instructions to print at least 5,000 copies, and to forward a copy to each Congregational church in the United States, and to other clergymen and prominent individuals, at their discretion ; and to furnish, at cost price, to the members of this church and society, whatever copies they may wish for private circulation.

On motion, the meeting adjourned.

JOHN C. BARNES, <i>Clerk</i> ,	}	Committee.
WALTER T. HATCH,		
EDWIN S. WATERMAN.		

HALLET & BREEN, PRINTERS, 58 & 60 FULTON ST., N. Y.

AN ADDRESS
ON
CONGREGATIONALISM

AS AFFECTED BY THE DECLARATIONS OF THE

ADVISORY COUNCIL

HELD IN BROOKLYN, N. Y., FEBRUARY, 1876;

BY

RICHARD S. STORRS, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE PILGRIMS,

IN BROOKLYN.

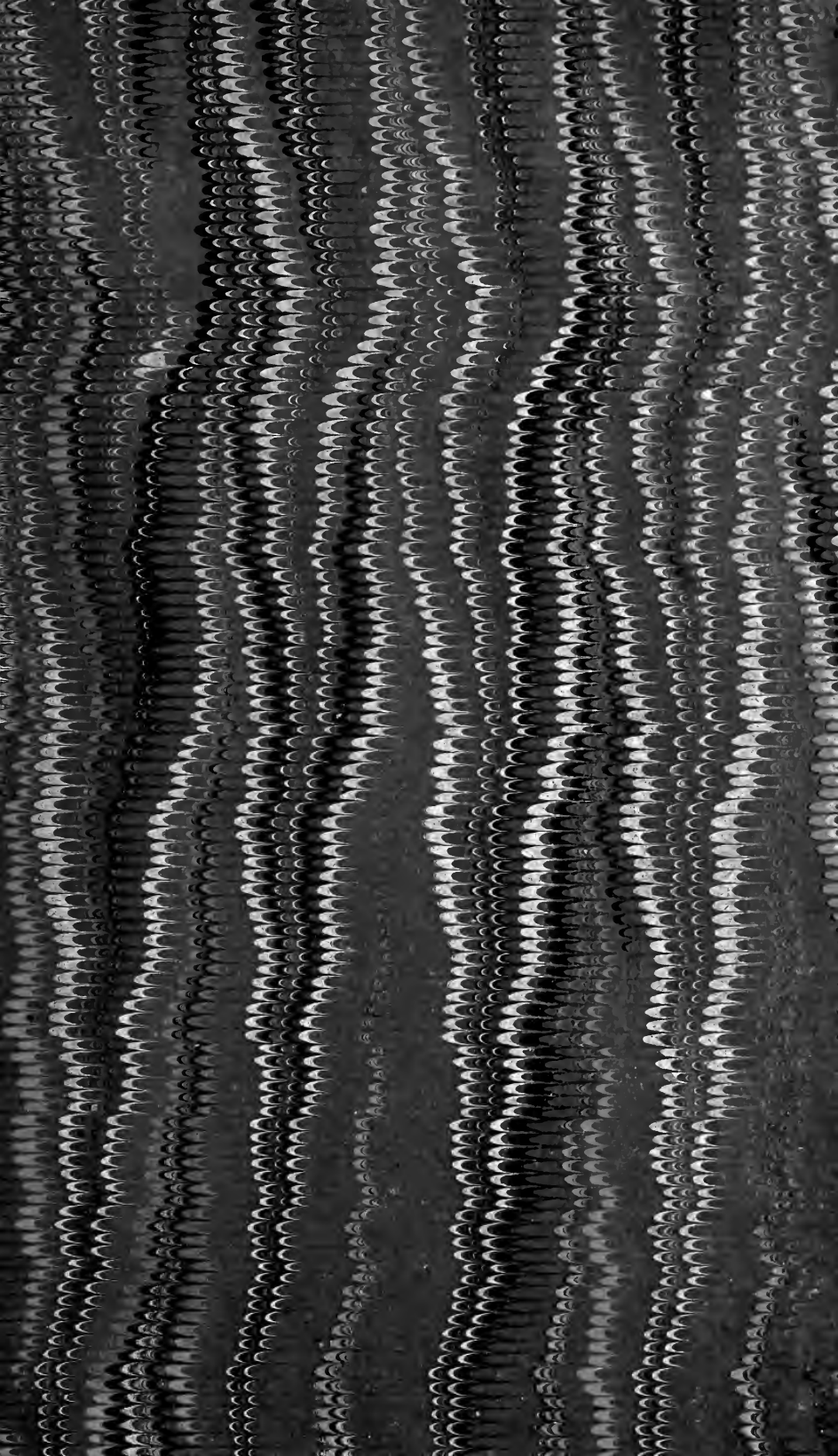
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